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Clean Water

By Sophie Braccini



New Zealand Mudsnail Photo provided

"It is more restrictive each year, although no base line has been set for the Town," says Sherbert, "Our trash reduction plan includes more frequent street sweeping and the installation of trash capture devices at the side inlets." Such devices are controversial- they require a lot of maintenance, and can cause risks or overflow when clogged.

The other element that can create clogging, though it may seem innocuous, is yard debris. "Some people have been disposing of their clipping in the creeks for years because they believe organic material will decompose," says Sherbert, "but this debris can accumulate downstream by someone else's property, create a dam and pose a risk of flooding."

The Town recommends that property owners make sure nothing will fall into the creek, keep the banks free of debris and make sure that nothing will obstruct the natural flow of water.

"Property owners who have a creek as part of their property boundary are obligated to maintain the creek bank," says Sherbert, "they can leave them natural. If nature has plants growing on creek banks it is for a reason, animals live there and it holds the bank."

While the Town encourages all residents to help keep creek banks clean, it discourages actual entry into the creek itself. "In addition to the risk of disturbing the natural habitat and potentially protected species, there is a risk of spreading invasive plants and wildlife from one creek to the next," says Sherbert, "In particular, the New Zealand Mudsnail has recently been spreading among creeks in the East Bay. This snail has no natural predators, and can overwhelm the native species." Sherbert explains that when workers enter creek beds and streams they are required to disinfect their clothing and tools to prevent the spread of the mud snail.

The Town supports several educational efforts to inform the public of the impacts of littering and how it affects the creeks, and usually has a booth at the Pear and Wine Festival, the Community Fair, and other events to provide information and literature on how to keep the creeks and storm water clean. There is a wealth of additional information available at the Contra Costa Clean Water Program web site, www.cccleanwater.org.

Moraga is a one-outlet town when it comes to storm water; all of it flows to the San Leandro reservoir - the main source of our drinking water. The Town of Moraga, in order to keep its storm water permit from the Regional Water Quality Control Board, has the obligation to keep the creek banks clean and develop a trash reduction plan. But most of Moraga's creeks are bordering private properties, and all that the Town's staff can do is educate residents to do their part to keep Moraga waters pristine.

"When a group of teen volunteers cleaned up the Town-owned banks of the creeks in the Commons Park all they collected, besides the obvious lost balls and Frisbees, was four Safeway plastic bags," says Moraga Staff Engineer John Sherbert, "It's the same thing when we monitored storm drains for trash; we found very little waste." Other towns find loads of plastic bags, tires, even appliances, and when they are close to a freeway they collect wind-born debris. "Our good results are an indication of the pride our residents have in their town," says Sherbert. The Town has nonetheless an obligation to engage in a trash reduction program per State mandate.

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